PARENTAL SMOKING AND OTITIS MEDIA IN CHILDREN

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OTITIS MEDIA ("GLUE EAR")

In addition to claims that parental smoking affects the respiratory health of children, there are claims that exposure to parental smoking might increase the risk of otitis media (commonly known as "glue ear") in children. Otitis media is an inflammation of the inner ear that often leads to an accumulation of fluid in the inner ear canal. Otitis media often appears as a complication of various viral and bacterial infections, including measles. If left undetected, otitis media can lead to hearing loss and learning disabilities. Authors of studies examining this issue have not formulated a widely accepted mechanism for how ETS might increase the risk of otitis media in children. There are two theories that are proposed but have not been scientifically proven: 1) One theory is that ETS somehow chronically irritates the eustachian tube of the inner ear, leading to the inflammation; and 2) The second theory is that ETS potentially increases the risk of upper respiratory tract infections that spread to the inner ear. The results of the studies on this subject are variable and are subject to the same confounders that potentially bias the results of studies on other ETS related issues. While the science on this issue is controversial, the reported seriousness of otitis media makes investigators anxious to make recommendations for child safety. However, the studies on otitis media and parental smoking have not established a clear association.

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RESULTS OF SELECTED STUDIES ON OTITIS MEDIA

Said, et al., 1978	Reported that number of tonsillectomies/adenoidectomies were related to the amount of parental smoking in the home
Pukander, et al., 1985	Reported that parental smoking in the home increased the risk of acute otitis media and that breast-feeding seemed to have a protective effect
Kallail, et al., 1987	Reported that parental smoking was not associated with the occurrence of otitis media
Zielhuis, 1989	Reported that parental smoking was not related to an increased risk of otitis media
Strachan, 1990	Reported that parental smoking was an important determinant of middle-ear underpressure and effusion
Strachan, 1989	Reported that approximately one-third of the cases of middle ear effusion in their subjects were attributable to passive smoking
Taninio, et al., 1988	Reported that parental smoking was more prevalent among the subjects with recurrent otitis media
Kraemer et al, 1983	Reported that parental smoking, atopy, and catarrh posed the greatest risk to children of developing persistent middle-ear effusions when present together in the same child

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Pukander, et al., 1990	Reported that maternal smoking increased the risk of acute otitis media in infants and especially of recurrent attacks
Vinther, et al., 1982	Reported that there were no effects of parental smoking on the frequency of otitis media in children
Moorhead, 1985	Reported that otitis media was found to be related to parental smoking in this general practice study
Black, 1985	Reported that parental smoking increased a child's risk of undergoing surgery for otitis media
Fleming, et al., 1987	Reported that full time day-care attendance increased the risk of ear infections (odds ratio = 3.8)

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